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## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Education

### **ABBOTSFORD KIDS GET EARLY START ON LEARNING**

**ABBOTSFORD** – Abbotsford-Clayburn MLA John van Dongen joined Abbotsford school district staff, children, parents and caregivers today to officially open the district's first StrongStart BC early learning centre at Alexander elementary.

"Abbotsford is a diverse, multicultural community and this new early learning centre will provide our preschoolers with valuable resources and educational activities," said van Dongen. "The Alexander StrongStart BC centre's positive learning environment will support all Abbotsford parents and caregivers to help their children feel comfortable, confident and ready for their first day of kindergarten."

The Alexander StrongStart BC centre offers a free drop-in program for parents or caregivers and their children. A qualified early childhood educator will lead activities, including stories, music, and arts, to help children grow linguistically, physically and socially, and become comfortable in a school-like setting. The district has partnered with the Central Abbotsford Community School Society to operate the centre.

"By placing StrongStart BC centres in schools that have available space, we are both getting maximum use out of the facilities and providing a program that helps parents prepare their children for the start of their formal education," said Abbotsford-Mt. Lehman MLA Michael de Jong.

"One out of every four students – or nearly 9,000 students each year – starts kindergarten without the skills needed to be successful in school," said Education Minister Shirley Bond. "StrongStart BC early learning centres help prepare our children for school and present new opportunities for parents or caregivers to get involved in their child's learning and education early on."

Similar to the School Community Connections program, which provides community access to underutilized space in schools, StrongStart BC centres use the excess school space to deliver valuable early learning services. The Abbotsford district received \$30,000 for start-up costs including renovations and the purchase of new equipment for the Alexander elementary in-school space and for operating costs, including staff, supplies and healthy snacks. The school district is receiving another \$30,000 for its second year of operation.

"The Abbotsford school board is very pleased to officially open our very first StrongStart BC centre at Alexander elementary school," said Joanne Field, Abbotsford school board chair. "We fully recognize that an early focus on literacy combined with parent involvement makes a powerful combination to ensure the success of our students. We applaud the government for the additional funding to enhance early literacy and look forward to future community partnership opportunities."

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All of B.C.'s 60 school districts have been offered the opportunity to participate in the StrongStart BC program. The Province is providing a total of \$5 million for up to 80 StrongStart BC centres as part ReadNow BC, the new provincial literacy plan.

The StrongStart BC centres help the Province reach its goal of making B.C. the best-educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent. Since 2001, government has invested over \$106 million in new literacy initiatives, including pre-literacy and early learning programs such as \$9.5 million to operate the kindergarten readiness program Ready, Set, Learn and \$2.7 million for the ActNow Literacy Education Activity and Play (LEAP BC) program that encourages literacy, physical activity and healthy eating in preschool-aged children.

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